

stroys them. I will tell you how I learned this. Formerly, when I wanted to take the siesta, I used to give orders that the flies should be cleared out and the curtain drawn and the door shut an hour before noon. On the disappearance of the flies, the mosquitoes would collect in the house and become exceedingly strong and powerful and bite me violently as soon as I began to rest. Now on a certain day I came in and found the room open and the curtain up. And when I lay down to sleep, there were no mosquitoes and I slept soundly, although I was very angry with the slaves. Next day they cleared out the flies and shut the door as usual, and on my coming to take the siesta I saw a multitude of mosquitoes. Then on another day they forgot to shut the door, and when I perceived that it was open I reviled them. However, when I came for the siesta, I did not find a single mosquito and I said to myself, 'Methinks I have slept on the two days on which my precautions were neglected, and have been hindered from sleeping whenever they were carefully observed. Why should not I try today the effect of leaving the door open? If I sleep three days with the door open and suffer no annoyance from the mosquitoes, I shall know that the right way is to have the flies and the mosquitoes together, because the flies destroy them, and that our remedy lies in keeping near us what we used to keep at a distance.' I made the experiment, and now the end of the matter is that whether we desire to remove the flies or destroy the mosquitoes, we can do it with very little trouble."

TRANSLATED BY R. A. NICHOLSON

AL-HALLAJ: THE CRUCIFIXION OF A MYSTIC

[from *Akhbār al-Hallaj*, Information about Al-Hallaj,
and other sources]

One of the most controversial figures to arise in early Sufism was Al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, who is also, thanks to the devoted labors of a great modern Islamicist, one of the best known.¹ It is still no easy task to formulate Al-Hallaj's mystical doctrine, far less so to capulate it. He embraced *fana'*, the extinction of personal consciousness, and other notions aimed at bridging the abyss between God and individual man in Islam. By the same token, to some he appeared blasphemously to contradict Islam's fundamental understanding of the transcendence of God and even to threaten the social order.

Al-Hallaj deliberately chose and taught the path of mystical union with God, comprehending but careless of the consequences of such a choice within a semi-theocratic state whose orthodox creed, though still in process of formulation, scorned and reproved it. He paid the supreme penalty for his choice. After many years of travel and teaching, he was arrested, imprisoned, and finally brutally executed in Baghdad in 922. The following selection comprises several reminiscences of his last days in which some of his ecstatic utterances are preserved.

I saw Hallaj in the Qat'a Market once. He was weeping bitterly and crying: Hide me from God, you people! Hide me from God! Hide me from God! He took me from myself and has not given me back; and I cannot perform the service I should do in His Presence for my fear of His leaving me alone again. He will leave me deserted, abandoned! and woe for the man who knows himself outcast after that Presence!

People were weeping to hear him. Then Hallaj stopped by the gate that leads into the Attab Mosque, and began to speak—words some part of which we understood, but part was obscure.

¹ Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Husayn-ibn-Mansour al Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1922).

Surely, said he in the clearer part, if He create creature of His, it must be in pure goodwill towards it. And if then He blazes upon it sometimes, and sometimes hides Himself from it behind a Veil, it is still always that the creature may go onward. If that Light never came, men would deny the very existence of God. If it was never veiled, all would be spellbound. That is why He will let neither state last forever. For me in this moment there is no Veil, not so much as a wink, between me and Him—a time for quiet, that my humanity die into His Deity while my body burns in the fire of His Power; that there be an end to trace and relic, face and word.

And then he said something which we could not understand: What you have to learn is this: that ordinary material things subsist atom by atom in His Godhead; that particular decrees are performed by Him as man. Then he recited these verses:

Prophecy is the Lamp of the world's light;

But ecstasy in the same Niche has room.

The Spirit's is the breath which sighs through me;

And mine the thought which blows the Trump of Doom.

Vision said it. In my eye

Moses stood, on Sinai.

I entered unannounced into Hallaj's room one day (says Ibn Fatik); someone had been in before me. Hallaj was in prayer, and his brow pressed to the ground. He was saying: O Thou Whose Closeness girds my very skin, Whose Mystery spurs me far away as lie all things in time from the Eternal, Thou shinest so before me that I think Thou art all these things; and then Thou dost deny Thyself in me, till I declare Thou art nothing here. And this can neither be Thy Distance, for that would fortify my selfhood, nor Thy Closeness, for that would help me; neither Thy War, for that would destroy me, nor Thy Peace, for that would comfort me.

Then, noticing my presence, he raised himself. Come in, you do not disturb me, said he.

So I went farther in and sat down in front of him. His eyes glowed like burning coals, and they were bloodshot.

My dear son, he said, I hear people are going about saying I am a saint, and others saying that I am impious. I prefer those who call me impious; and so does God.

How so, master? I said.

They call me a saint because they respect me; but the others call me impious out of zeal for their religion. A man who is zealous for his religion is dearer to me, and dearer to God also, than a man who venerates a creature. What will you say yourself, Ibrahim, on the day when you see me hanging on the gibbet, and killed, and burned? Yet that will be the happiest day of all my life.

Well, don't stay here, he said presently. Go, and into the Grace of God.

When the giving of Love is entire,
And What Love cries to is bygone in the stress of its crying,
Then a man verifies
What passion testifies:
Prayer is Unbelief
Once one knows.

Ay, go. Tell them I sailed for the deep Sea,
And that my ship has foundered far offshore.
By Holy Cross I must go on to death;
To Holy Cities I can go no more.

I have renounced the Faith of God.
Obligatory on me
It was to do what for Belief
Would be iniquity.

Hallaj went one day into the Mosque of Mansur and cried: Gather round, and listen to what I have to tell.

And a great crowd assembled: lovers and followers of his, and haters and critics too.

You ought to know this, said Hallaj: God has made me your outlaw. Kill me.

People in the crowd began to weep; but Abd al-Wudud the Sufi pressed nearer to him and said: Shaykh, how could we kill a man who prays and fasts and recites the Word?

Shaykh, said Hallaj, the motive that really stays you from shedding my blood has nothing to do with Prayer or fasting or reciting the Word. So why not kill me? You will have your reward for it, and I shall come to my peace. For you it will be your Holy War; for me it will be my Martyrdom.

When Hallaj left the Mosque (says Abd al-Wudud) I followed him home and questioned him: Shaykh, what you have said troubles us. What did you mean?

Dear son, said he, no task is more urgent for the Muslims at this moment than my execution. Realize this, that my death will preserve the sanctions of the Law; he who has offended *must* undergo them.

His preaching went on. At last the Jurist Ibn Dawud gave this opinion: If what the Prophet—God's Prayer and Peace on him—brought us from God is true, then what Hallaj says is false. He concluded a violent attack with the words: He may lawfully be put to death.

Ibn Furat gave order for the arrest; but Hallaj left Baghdad with one of his disciples. This was in the year 297.

In the year 301 Hallaj was arrested at Susa and sent up to the capital. Evidence was collected in both Ahwaz and Baghdad that he had claimed divinity; he was also accused of as-

serting that the Deity took up His abode in members of the Alid House. For the time being he was committed to imprisonment in the Royal Palace.

In the euphoria of passion, said Hallaj, I have been exuberant. And the punishment for exuberance has overtaken me.

It was not till the year '9 that the affair came to a head, and to an end in his death and burning. All this time he was lodged in the Palace, well treated and allowed to receive visitors. His fraudulent pretensions made a complete dupe of Nasr the Chamberlain, who had charge of him; and Hamid ibn Abbas, then Vizier, heard tales that Hallaj had gained an ascendancy over various Attendants and other people about court by pretending that he could raise the dead and perform at pleasure any of the miracles attributed to the Prophets. Certain State Clerks, and even a member of the Hashimite family, were reported to be acting as his apostles and declaring that he, Hallaj, was God (the blasphemy of it!).

These persons were arrested, and confessed under cross-examination by Hamid that they were acting as the man's missionaries and were convinced that he was a god, with power to raise the dead. But when they repeated these statements in the presence of Hallaj himself, he repudiated them: God forbid, said he, that I should pretend to divinity, or to Prophecy—I am merely a man who worships God and practices prayer and fasting and good works; that is all.

By and by Hamid turned up a letter written by Hallaj which contained the following passage:

"If a man would go on Pilgrimage and cannot, let him set apart in his house some square construction, to be touched by no unclean thing, and let no one have access to it. When the day of the Pilgrimage rites comes, let him make his circuit round it, and perform all the same ceremonies as he would perform at Mecca. Then let him gather together thirty orphans, for whom he has prepared the most exquisite feast he can get; let him bring them to his house and serve them that feast; and after waiting on them himself, and washing their hands as a servant himself, let him present each of them with a new frock, and give them each seven dirhams. This will be a substitute for Pilgrimage."

My father (says Ibn Zanjī) was reading this letter in evidence at a hearing; and as he finished this passage, Judge Abu Omar turned to Hallaj.

Where did you get that doctrine? he asked.

From Hasan of Basra's *Book of Devotion*, Hallaj replied.

That is false, said the Judge. Outlaw! we ourselves heard Hasan of Basra's *Devotion* when we were studying at Mecca, and there is nothing like that in it.

When Abu Omar used the term *Outlaw*, Hamid broke in,

ordering him to put it in writing. The Judge went on trying to give his attention to Hallaj; in his opinion this doctrine was Atheism, and as such punishable with immediate death, for the atheist is given no chance of repentance. But Judge Ibn Buhul gave his opinion that this in itself did not constitute a capital crime, unless Hallaj were to confess that he not only recorded this doctrine but also believed it—men sometimes record heretical doctrines without holding them. If Hallaj will declare, he went on, that he merely reports this doctrine, but does not himself believe it, then he should be summoned to recant; and if he recants there will be no case against him. If he refuses, then indeed he will deserve death.

But Hamid would not allow the examination to continue; he kept insisting—and finally in a tone which there was no gainsaying—that Abu Omar put in writing his opinion that Hallaj was an Outlaw. The Judge obeyed and signed; and the others present at the trial began to follow suit.

When Hallaj saw what was going on, he cried out: My blood must not be shed like this. You have no right to outlaw me by a quibble. My religion is Islam, my sect the True Way—there are books of mine maintaining the True Way in the bookstores at this moment. I adjure you in the Name of God, *do not shed my blood.*

During the whole time the people present at the hearing were putting their names to Abu Omar's opinion, he kept this up. When the signatures of all present were on the paper, Hamid sent it off to the Caliph Muqtadir.

Nasr the Chamberlain went to warn the Queen-Mother. I am afraid, he told her, that God's Vengeance will come on your son for the death of this devout teacher. So she went to Muqtadir and begged him to spare Hallaj. It was no use: the Caliph, ignoring her request, sent to Hamid the following rescript:

"Inasmuch as the judicial sentence is as you have transmitted it to us, have him taken to the Police Office and scourged with a thousand stripes; if he is not then dead, order his hands and feet amputated and his head then struck off; set his head on a stake and burn his body."

But that same day Muqtadir fell sick of a fever. This coincidence served to inflame the fancies of Nasr and the Queen-Mother; even Muqtadir felt uneasy, and sent Hamid a hurried order to put off the execution. So it was delayed for some days, until the Caliph recovered and his fears abated.

Hamid now urged that the prisoner be put to death without further delay. Muqtadir tried to put the question aside as unimportant.

Prince of the True Believers, said the Vizier, if this man is left to live, he will corrupt the Law and make apostates of your subjects. That will be the end of your dynasty. Let me carry

out the sentence. If any trouble comes of it, you may order me to death myself.

Permission was granted. It was agreed that the Chief of Police should come after dark, for fear of a rescue, and bring a company of slaves and men mounted on mules, dressed as grooms, so that Hallaj might be set on one of the mules and huddled along in the middle of the crowd. Nazuk carried these instructions out, and conveyed Hallaj away that night, Hamid's retainers riding with them as far as the Bridge. The Chief of Police himself passed the night with his men, who lay picketed round the Session House building.

On the night before his delivery to execution (says his son Hamd), Hallaj stood up and performed the ordinary Prayer of two Bows. After that, he fell to repeating the word *Illusion*, *illusion* . . . to himself, and so continued till the night was more than half spent. Then for a long while he remained silent. Suddenly he gave a cry: *Truth! Truth!* and sprang to his feet. He bound on his turban, donned his cloak, stretched out his arms, and facing the Direction, fell into an ecstasy and talked with God.

Ibrahim ibn Fatik, his servant, and I, who were with him, both remembered some parts of what he then said: these:—

See, he said, we are ready to be called as Thy witnesses, and come for refuge into Thy Grace; into the splendor of Thy Glory, into the Brightness, for Thy declaring of whatever Thou pleasest. *IN HEAVEN—GOD. ON EARTH—GOD.* O Setter of the Cycles and Shaper of Forms, O by Whose Decree these bodies are compounded! Thou wilt come shining to sight, when Thou wilt, on whom Thou wilt, and as Thou wilt, even as Thou didst blazon Thy Decree in the image of that *FAIREST FORM* of Adam, that Form which shall blazon forth the Word, the sole form gifted with knowledge and speech, and free power and proof.

Thou it was didst assign this Thy witness here his part to speak as Thyself. How then is it come to this? For Thou it was didst will my beginning, Thou Who didst seize my being to use it for Thy symbol, Thou Who didst proclaim it, at my last and highest, as My Divine Being, Who didst display the Reality of my knowledge, and those miracles I wrought. Thou it was didst raise me up at my ascensions to those thrones of my own pre-eternity, and didst cause me to speak the BE! of my own creation.

How is it come to this? that now I go to die, to suffer a felon's death, to hang on a gibbet, my body to be burned, my ashes given to the winds and streams for keeping? Ah!

Surely, surely the least portion of this flesh which has been Thine incense is promise for the body of my Rising, promise of reality more sure than the mightiest hills are real!

Then he began to speak in verse:

For souls whose witness now departs, to go beyond Until,
into the Witness of Eternity,

For those miracles whose dialectic shut the mouth of argument,
Hear my sorrow, Thou!

In the name of Thy Love! for all the valiancy of that saintly
chivalry, who rode themselves as steeds,

For them to be lost and gone, like unheeding Ad, or the
long-lost Worldly Garden!

And then, the abandoned herd, wandering, stumbling,
Blinder than beasts, blinder than flocking sheep.

He fell silent again. After a while his servant Ibrahim said:
Master, give me some word for a keepsake.

Your self! he answered. Unless you enslave it, it will en-
slave you.

When the morning dawned, they came to fetch him out into
the Square. As I watched him go, he was dancing in his chains.

A crowd beyond counting was assembled.

I was there (says Abu Hasan of Hulwan) the day they
executed Hallaj. They brought him from his cell bound and
chained; but he was laughing.

Master, said I, why are you like this?

He answered only with a verse:

My Host, with His own ruthless courtesy,
Passed me His Cup, and bade me drink. I drank.
Round went the wine; sudden I heard Him cry:
Headman! the Mat and Sword! This is the end
Of drink with Liodragon in July.

When they had brought him as far as the gibbet, and he
saw the scaffold and the nails, he laughed till the tears ran from
his eyes. Presently, turning to look at the crowd assembled, he
saw Shibli among the rest.

Abu Bakr, said he, have you your prayer carpet with you?
Yes, said Shibli.
Will you lay it for me?

Shibli laid out his carpet. Hallaj performed a Prayer of two
Bows, reciting the passage *WE SHALL TRY YOU* with the
first and the passage *ALL SOULS TASTE DEATH* with the
second. When his Prayer was finished, he spoke; I can only
remember some of his words, the following:

O our God! Who dost glow in all places and art not in any
place, I beseech Thee by the truth of Thy Word which declares
that I am, by the truth of this my word which declares that

Thou art, I beseech Thee, my Master, give me grace to be grateful for this happiness of Thy giving, that Thou didst hide from others what was unveiled to me, the raging fires of Thy Face, and forbid them to look, as I was permitted to look, into things hidden in the Mystery of Thee.

And these Thy servants who are gathered to slay me, in zeal for Thy Religion, longing to win Thy Favor, forgive them, Lord. Have mercy on them. Surely, if Thou hadst shown them what Thou hast shown me, they would never have done what they have done; and hadst Thou kept from me what Thou hast kept from them, I should not have suffered this tribulation. Whatsoever Thou wilt do, I praise Thee! Whatsoever Thou dost will, I praise Thee!

Then he was silent. The headsmen stepped up to him and dealt him a smashing blow between the eyes; the blood poured from his nostrils. Shibli cried out, and rent his dress, and fell fainting.

The headsmen was ordered to administer one thousand strokes with a scourge. It was done. Hallaj uttered no cry, nor did he plead for pardon.

Only according to one witness, when he had endured the six-hundredth blow, he cried out to the Chief of Police: Send for me! and I'll tell you what will more profit the Caliph than the storming of Constantinople!

They told me to expect some such offer, answered Nazuk, or a bigger one. It won't get you out of your stripes—nothing will.

After that Hallaj said nothing more until the thousandth blow came at last. His hand was then amputated, then his foot; and he was fastened on the gibbet.

There he hung till nightfall, when an order arrived from the Caliph Muqtadir giving permission for his beheading. However, the officer in charge said: it is late now—leave him till tomorrow.

When morning came he was taken down and dragged forward for decapitation. It was at this time that he spoke his last words: All who have known ecstasy long for this . . . the loneliness of the Only One . . . alone with the Alone.

He was set a little way in front of the gibbet, and his head struck off. The trunk was rolled up in a strip of reed-matting, and soaked in naphtha, then burned.

I was there (says the Clerk Ibn Zanjī). I was standing up as tall as I could on the back of my mule—I had not been able to get into the Square. The trunk twisted on the coals as the flames burned it. When there was nothing left but ashes, they were collected and thrown from the Minaret over the Tigris. The head was set up on the Bridge for two days, and

then sent to Khurasan to be exhibited in the various districts. All booksellers were summoned to appear and obliged to take an oath that they would neither sell nor buy any work by Hallaj.

His disciples asserted that the person who had endured the scourging was not he, but some enemy of his on whom his likeness had been cast. Some of them even claimed to have seen him afterward, and to have heard something from him to that effect, along with more nonsense not worth the trouble of transcribing.

TRANSLATED BY ERIC SCHROEDER